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STATE PASS TO USAID AFR/SD IMACNARIN

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TAGS: PGOV PREF PREL AO

SUBJECT: UNITA LEADER WANTS PRESSURE FOR ELECTIONS

REF: LUANDA 756

Classified By: CDA FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: UNITA President Isaias Samakuva and CDA Francisco Fernandez discussed elections and party politics in an August 20th meeting. Samakuva expressed concern over the GRA's lack of urgency regarding elections and asked that the USG strongly "encourage" the GRA to set a date for elections.

Despite continuing concerns about the voter registration process and questionable chances in legislative elections, Samakuva expressed UNITA's commitment to the electoral process and a long-term strategy of party development at the grassroots level. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) Charge d'Affaires Francisco Fernandez and UNITA President Isaias Samakuva discussed upcoming legislative elections and the party's future in a meeting on August 20th ¶2007. Samakuva informed the Charge that he is still hopeful for legislative elections in 2008, but said it is increasingly difficult to believe that the GRA is on track to conduct elections next year. He confirmed that President dos Santos said that he sees no reasons why legislative elections shouldn't occur in 2008 in an August 15th meeting between the two leaders. Samakuva pointed out, however, that despite similar personal assurances in the past, reasons for delays always seem to crop up. He asked that the USG increase pressure on the GRA to set a date for elections and stated that high-level "encouragement" is needed. Samakuva did note, however, that with 7.3 million already registered, it was looking like the GRA's options to further delay the legislative elections were closing.

¶3. (C) Samakuva noted some of his party's concerns with the voter registration process, including allegations that the government still hasn't registered in opposition strongholds. UNITA does not, however, plan to publicly attack the GRA over these issues at this time, as it believes such tactics will simply supply a reason to once again extend the registration process and further delay elections. Samakuva also acknowledged that the separation of legislative and presidential elections puts his party in an awkward position: it will be both an opposition party and a member of the National Reconstruction Government (GRN), holding ministry and provincial government positions as negotiated in the peace accords. Although decisions have not been made on timing, he affirmed that the party will remove itself from the GRN in advance of the elections, although he did not clarify if he meant the legislative or presidential elections.

¶4. (C) Unlike the bold statements made by many opposition leaders, Samakuva did not predict UNITA's victory or even additional seats in legislative elections, but stated that parties can't wait until they are certain they will win to conduct elections. He did state, however, that he felt that UNITA would not lose any ground in the Congress. While UNITA research conducted in Luanda in 2005 indicated that 15

percent of UNITA members were leaning towards voting for other parties, he was encouraged by the more than 50 percent of MPLA members who indicated they were thinking of voting outside the party. UNITA plans to conduct additional research on these trends and develop strategies to lure voters to their side.

¶15. (SBU) Samakuva stated that the party is continuing its work to create a strong grassroots presence throughout the country, and they plan to train 60,000 party members to cover polling stations nationwide when elections are held. To these ends, he would like to increase the party's capacity building efforts with USAID and the USAID-funded International Republican Institute.

¶16. (C) COMMENT: Samakuva, still basking in the glow of his landslide victory over rival Abel Chivukuvuku (reftel), displayed the confident aura of a leader with a mandate to strengthen the party's base and create a long-term strategy for growth. Samakuva has opted to keep his complaints about GRA actions and possible registration irregularities behind closed doors to avoid giving the GRA an excuse for further delaying elections. He seems to accept that the problems in voter registration are part of the democratic learning curve and will continue to work publicly with the government towards elections. However, he clearly hopes to prod the international community to use its limited political capital to push the GRA towards a firm electoral calendar. END

COMMENT
FERNANDEZ